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ABSTRACT

Robert G. Ingersoll exerted considerable social impact on American culture, employing rhetorical persuasion to champion the free thought movement of the late 1880's. Primarily concerned with advocating the principle of individual freedom of thought and expression in religious life, he enraged his contemporary churchmen who were devoted to group conformity in faith and traditional orthodox theological commitments. Reverend Ingersoll's liberal religion and humanism sought intellectual freedom in the political realm as well, and his well-known addresses assumed inportance on the national level as well as in the Midwest. (KS)

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Daniel Ross Chandler

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL
SPOKESMAN FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION

Robert G. Ingersoll remains a fascinating, colorful contributor to liberal religion. Wayland Maxfield Parrish and Alfred Dwight Huston, who recognized Mr. Ingersoll as among the most prominent speakers during a twenty year period, concluded that few Americans addressed as many or as varied audiences and secured higher esteem.[1] Contending that "no adequate history of American thought and its expression can afford to ignore Ingersoll,"[2] Lionel Crocker documented Ingersoll's influence upon Beveridge, LaFollette Darrow, Debbs, Borah, Bryan and Whitman. Sidney Warren wrote in American Freethought 1860-1914:

> Ingersoll was undoubtedly the most notable leader of the freethought movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century. While Thomas Paine was able to arouse men's feelings by his unusual literary skill, the genius of Ingersoll was expressed in his consummate oratorical ability. This was the outstanding gift which Ingersoll bestowed upon freethought in general and agnosticism in particular.[3]

Michael Monahan presented his evaluation:

> Ingersoll was no mere echo and imitator of the great liberals who preceded him. He had a message of his own to his generation. He was the best-equipped, most formidable and persistent advocate of the liberal principle which this country, at least, has ever known; and it is extremely doubtful if his equal as a popular propagandist was to be found anywhere.[4]

Stow Persons concurred with his conclusion: "Ingersoll's services in popularizing the implications of scientific thought for orthodox theology were admittedly great, but his criticism was destructive, and he could offer his followers nothing but a vague, unoriented humanism."[5] Further, J. M. Robertson summarized Ingersoll's impressive contribution:

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> Individual energy, however, produced for a time in the States a freethinking platform and pamphlet propaganda of the most effective kind. Only in the United States, indeed, has the public lecture platform been made a means of propaganda to anything like the extent seen in Great Britain; and the greatest part of the work in the States has thus far been done by the late Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-99), the leading American orator of the last generation, and the most widely influential platform propagandist of the last century. No other single freethinker, it is believed, has reached so large an audience by public speech; and between his propaganda and that of the freethought journals there has been maintained for more than a generation back a body of vigorous freethinking opinion in all parts of the States. Ingersoll had not only oratorical power of the highest order but a rare gift of humor; and if his Mistakes of Moses excited special outcry by its play of American ridicule on "Scripture" it was none the less effective. But Ingersoll's propaganda was not restricted to such effects. His ethical indictment of orthodox religion, couched in an eloquence not to be matched in the contemporary pulpit, was the deepest source of his influence, and had a practical effect on the pulpit itself. His indictment of religious delusion and Biblical ethics was never really answered by the clerics and others who affected to dismiss it.[6]

Evidently, Ingersoll exerted considerable social impact upon American culture, employing powerful rhetorical persuasion. He used his rich rhetoric to champion the freethought movement, which advocated individual freedom of thought and expression in religious speculation and institutions and the democratic process for determining truth in human affairs. Significant during his particular generation, Ingersoll exerted a persistent influence upon the liberal religious movement within the United States.

Ingersoll's reputation for militant hostility toward orthodox Christianity endures. Although a more gracious attitude toward the liberal religious movement has developed within America, Ingersoll is remembered as an iconoclast. Walter P. Rusterholtz recognized that Ingersoll's critics did not appreciate the religious element of his character, but that the damage inflicted upon his reputation persists.[7]

Unfortunately, the criticism against Ingersoll from orthodox clergymen of his generation reveals how harsh and ungracious ministers can become when

defending something they consider sacred. The Reverend W. H. Platt contended, "He seems to seek applause rather than truth, and to denounce rather than to disprove."[8] Reverend Platt stated:

> The logic of his comic infidelity is as crooked and straggling as the sticks of a brush heap. A sneer is not debatable. But the merriment extorted by his jests outruns the conviction he seeks to make, and ends in wounding the moral sense of the public at the utterance of his shocking opinions.[9]

The Reverend Thomas Dixon, Jr. suggested:

> The only answer necessary to give Colonel Ingersoll is to point out his many blunders in logic, his mistakes of history, his weakness, credulity, sophistries, contradictions and misstatements - and no argument is left.[10]

However, it is doubtful that Reverend Dixon found time to execute such a competent refutation. Meanwhile, The Reverend L. A. Lambert gave the impression that Robert G. Ingersoll's attack was deadly and disastrous:

> Everything held sacred by every Christian heart has been made the subject of his gibes, and of laughter for his audience. And all this time while he has been combining the professions of the philosopher, the humorist and the ghoul, he has talked sweetly of delicacy, refinement, sentiment, feeling, honor bright, etc. All this time he has delighted in tearing and wounding and lacerating the hearts and faith and feelings of those by whose tolerance he is permitted to outrage the common sense and sentiment of Christendom.[11]

Another man of the cloth, The Reverend Samuel Ives Curtis described Ingersoll: "He comes to those who are often in prayer, who mourn over sin, who are struggling and crying for a purer and better life, like that of Jesus, and tells them that religion is a sham."[12] Dr. George C. Lorimer lamented in a similar style:

> Its loftiest sentiments are borrowed from the religion it affects to despise; the liberty which it claims to champion, it has sacrificed but little to secure; and the sweet charities it commends, it has done nothing to establish. The garland of eloquence wherewith it clothes itself, is the adornment of a corpse, every flower sheaths a worm in its bosom, and every breath of fragrance is mingled with death. Its oratory smells of the tomb, and the symbol of its hope is an eyeless, tongueless skull, grinning in mocking insolence at everything that dignifies and ennobles life.[13]

Another criticism came from James Maclaughlin:

> The Colonel has employed all the arts of sophistry, as well as slander, to undermine Christianity, and upon God and the Bible he has poured the fire of wit, sarcasm, ridicule, and everything of that kind; but let sober judgment sit down, examine, analyze, and weigh the production, and there is not there the earnestness and heart of a sincere reformer, but rather the foolery and flings and fantasies of the circus clown, whose chief object is to start a laugh.[14]

George R. Wendling inferred that if Ingersoll were correct, "Christ was at the best an enthusiast; the Bible is a curse; religion a conscious or unconscious sham; a future reckoning a chimera; and immortality perhaps a fancy."[15] While much in the criticism from these ministers and censors might seem true, the fact that these assertions generally were not supported with specific logical arguments and sustained with appropriate evidence leaves these charges open to suspicion. However, it is significant to recognize that a different criticism came from The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher:

> Mr. Ingersoll is a man of great merit and power and he has made himself perhaps as widely known as almost any other man in this generation by his condemning of, I will not say religion, but of those views of religion handed down to us by the teachers of Christianity. He has great power of the imagination - a flaming wit - and he has said a great many things, not wise, but by which wise men may profit.[16]

From these quotations, it is illustrated that criticism from selected ministers varied in degree of disdain, but all seem generally negative.

II.

Born in Dresden, Yates County, New York, about August 11, 1833,[17] Robert G. Ingersoll was a son of The Reverend John Ingersoll and Mary Livingston Ingersoll. Mrs. Ingersoll died on December 2, 1835. When The Reverend John Ingersoll, a Congregational and Presbyterian clergyman, denounced chattel slavery, the family was forced to journey westward through Pennsylvania,

Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and Illinois.[18] A highlight of Reverend Ingersoll's ministry happened on April 2, 1834, when he became associate pastor of the Second Free Presbyterian Church in New York City, where he served with The Reverend Charles G. Finney. When his persistent inquiry found little satisfaction from his reading in the Old Testament and in John Calvin which were found in his father's library, Robert G. Ingersoll studied the literature of the humanities, especially the compositions of Robert Burns and William Shakespeare.[19] Herman E. Kittredge described young Ingersoll's intellectual development:

> His horizon grew wide and grand. He became a circumnavigator of the intellectual globe, - a mental Magellan. Like the latter, he had seen the shadow on the moon, - the theological moon, - and he believed, in spite of the warnings and admonitions of the stupidly wise and timid, the world of mind is round. And he demonstrated the reasonableness of his belief. Starting with the idea that there were, in the dim and far-off seas of thought, lands fairer and grander than the narrow, barren, rock-bound island of Christian theology, he returned with his views confirmed, and even strengthened.[20]

Ingersoll studied briefly at an academy located in Greenville, Illinois, under Socrates Smith. In September, 1852, he moved with his father from Greenville to Mount Vernon in Jefferson County, Illinois, where Robert taught school and The Reverend John Ingersoll ministered to the people of his pastorate. Traveling with his father through Tennessee and Alabama where he observed and denounced slave trade, Robert G. Ingersoll found a teaching position into which he temporarily settled in Waverly, Humphrey's County, Tennessee. He returned to Marion, Illinois, in May, 1854. The Reverend John Ingersoll died in Robert's arms, having requested that his son read to him from Plato concerning immortality.[21] Robert G. Ingersoll and his brother Ebon read law for a month before they were admitted to the bar in July, 1854, on ex gratia basis; official admission to the Illinois Bar was granted the Ingersoll brothers in Mount Vernon, Illinois, on December 20, 1854.[22] They established

a law practice in Shawneetown, Illinois, in 1854; they moved to Peoria soon thereafter. In 1856, at the age of twenty-three, Robert G. Ingersoll delivered his first public speech, a eulogy to Thomas Paine, at a church barbeque-picnic in Shawneetown.[23] On August 2, 1860, in Peoria, the Democrats nominated Robert G. Ingersoll for United States Representative from the Fourth Congressional District. Ingersoll and the incumbent, Judge William B. Kellogg, scheduled, in the Lincoln-Douglas fashion, twenty-one debates in eleven counties from August 27 to October 31.[24] Ingersoll was defeated in the general election, but his reputation as a speaker grew.[25] As commander of the Eleventh Illinois Cavalry Regiment in the American Civil War, Ingersoll was engaged in the battle of Shiloh. On December 2, 1862, he was appointed cavalry chief under Brigadier General Jeremy C. Sullivan. When Ingersoll was captured in the Tennessee Valley, he was paroled by General Nathan Bedford Forest. Following his release, Ingersoll returned to his wife, Eva Amelia Parker Ingersoll, whom he married on February 13, 1862.

Ingersoll grew in political stature. He served as attorney general of Illinois between 1867 and 1869, at the appointment of Governor Richard J. Oglesby.[26] Robert G. Ingersoll was denied the nomination for Governor of Illinois at the Republican convention assembled in Peoria in May, 1868.[27] His reputation as a religious agnostic might have influenced convention delegates to seek a different candidate.[28] Ingersoll's biographers sometime include a statement attributed to Ingersoll during the course of the early convention:

> Gentlemen, I am not asking to be Governor of Illinois, and it is a grave question with me whether I would accept this nomination if offered. I have in my composition that which I have declared to the world as my views on religion. My position I would not, under any circumstances, not even for my life, seem to renounce. I would rather refuse to be President of the United States than to do so. My religious belief is my own. It belongs to me, not to the

> State of Illinois. While I believe in the right of every man to think as he pleases, yet I have the moral honesty to declare from the house tops my convictions.[29]

National recognition as a powerful public persuader came when Robert G. Ingersoll captivated the Republican national convention with a nominating speech in behalf of James G. Blaine in Cincinnati, Ohio, on June 15, 1876.[30] During the campaign which followed, Ingersoll travelled widely as a popular platform speaker.[31] As a forensic speaker, Ingersoll established a reputation in the Mid-West; as a political persuader, he secured national attention; as a critic of orthodox religion, he gained enduring remembrance. Traveling across the United States, Ingersoll eventually spoke in every state except North Carolina, Mississippi, and Oklahoma, even entering Canada.[32] He was endorsed for appointment as United States Ambassador to Germany.[33] Ingersoll's failure to campaign for Blaine in 1884 may have contributed substantially to the Republican's defeat.[34]

In 1879, Ingersoll moved to Washington, D.C., where he was closely situated to the national government; in 1885 he moved to New York to serve the interests of his corporation clientele. Robert G. Ingersoll died at Walston, Dobbs Ferry, New York, on July 21, 1899.[35]

III.

The religious philosophy Ingersoll professed and proclaimed was communicated primarily through spoken discourse, which as public lectures were published and preserved through an authorized Dresden edition. Accounts of Ingersoll's addresses, sometimes verbatim reports, appeared in newspapers. The Dresden edition contains Ingersoll's caution that unauthorized texts are inaccurate as legitimate statements.

Estimating which religious lectures are his best remains dependent upon the criteria employed in that judgment; however, historically, several speeches remain hall-marks in Ingersoll's professional speaking career. The first lecture in which Ingersoll articulated his agnosticism was "Progress," an address delivered in Pekin, Illinois, in 1860, and repeated in Bloomington, Illinois, in 1864. "The Gods" made Ingersoll famous as an agnostic overnight. Because Ingersoll's "Liberty" was demanded frequently and received with popular acclaim, this lecture might be his most singularly effective rhetorical discourse. Robert Green Ingersoll's last lecture was presented before the Free Religious Association in Boston, Massachusetts, on April 2, 1899. Entitled, "What Is Religion?", this religious discourse, according to Wakefield, "represents the full flowering of Ingersoll's intellectual maturity, combining the serenity and poise of age with the idealism and radicalism of youth."[36]

IV.

Commanding the English language with rich rhetorical ability, Robert G. Ingersoll was primarily concerned with advocating the principle of individual freedom of thought and expression in religious life, as opposed to blind group conformity in faith to traditional orthodox theological commitments. Predicated upon his acceptance of human reason as an instrument for discovery of truth, Ingersoll's "scientific humanism" was advocated persuasively by a powerful platform personality who was widely respected for his personal intellectual integrity and his unimpeachable ethics. Respected by his biographer Dr. Herman E. Kittredge as "the Phidias of verbal sculpture - the Micaelangelo of words," Robert G. Ingersoll rejected claims of the

supernatural by contending that a thinking mind is a nobler monument than a Gothic cathedral and that inquiring intelligence is holier than revealed scriptures. In "Human Rights" he said:

> Now, I do not say there is no God, but what I do say is that I do not know. The only difference between me and the theologians is that I am honest. There may or there may not be an infinite Being, but I do not know it, and until I do I cannot conceive of any obedience I owe to any unknown being.[37]

Dr. Kittredge quoted Ingersoll with a particular passage which summarized his essential and characteristic philosophical orientation:

> When I became convinced that the Universe is natural - that all the ghosts are myths, there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood, the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom....For the first time I was free....I stood erect and fearlessly, joyously, faced all worlds. And then my heart was filled with gratitude, with thankfulness, and went out in love to all the heroes, the thinkers who gave their lives for the liberty of hand and brain....And then I vowed to grasp the torch that they had held, and hold it high, that light might conquer darkness still.[38]

From this citation and similar statements, it appears that Ingersoll was concerned in promoting heresy, in challenging the established ecclesiastical beliefs. Further, Ingersoll insisted, "I would fight just as earnestly that the Christian may go to Church as that the infidel may have the right to spend the Sabbath as he chooses."[39] Without the bitter cynicism which frequently characterizes frustrated scepticism, without purely negative criticism which destroys without rebuilding, without antagonism for unquestioning believers who walk in faith, Ingersoll insisted that freedom of personal choice was primary. "Religion tries to force all minds into one mould," he maintained.[40] "My brain is my castle, and when I waive the right to defend it, I become an intellectual serf and slave."[41] Ingersoll insisted, "In the world of thought, each man is an absolute monarch, each brain is a kingdom, that cannot be invaded even by the tyranny of majorities."[42] In one of his best known and most significant speeches, "Plea for Individuality and

Arraignment of the Church," Ingersoll proclaimed:

> Surely there is grandeur in knowing that in the realm of thought, at least, you are without a chain; that you have a right to explore all the heights and all depth; that there are no walls, no fences, no prohibited places, nor sacred corners in all the vast expanse of thought; that your intelligence owes no allegiance to any being human or divine; that you hold all in fee and upon no condition and by no tenure whatever; that in the world of mind you are relieved from all personal dictation, and from the ignorant tyranny of majorities.[43]

This call to intellectual spaciousness and mental honesty, however, was more than a rejection of bland conformity to collective belief; for it constituted a broadening influence upon narrow dogmatic fundamentalism which was supported sometimes with considerable ignorance and superstition.

Although Ingersoll championed the principle of individual freedom of thought and expression, he contended that the rationality of the human mind should be conditioned by the emotional sensitivity of the human heart. His was the religion of humanity similar to that described by Octavius Brooks Frothingham in his book bearing that title and by Stow Persons in Free Religion. Ingersoll said:

> Man is greater than these phantoms. Humanity is grander than all the creeds, than all the books. Humanity is the great sea, and these creeds, and books, and religions are but the waves of a day. Humanity is the sky, and these religions and dogmas and theories are but the mists and clouds changing continually, destined finally to melt away.[44]

While Ingersoll expressed praise for humanity, he was expecially sympathetic and appreciative toward the suffering and sacrifice of heretics whom society persecuted. In his moving speech entitled "Religious Intolerance," Ingersoll stated that society administered the hemlock to Socrates and that society in Jerusalem freed Barrabas but crucified Jesus.[45] In "The Great Infidels" Ingersoll illustrated how the infidels of one generation become the honored saints for succeeding generations.[46] While he praised humanity, Ingersoll recognized errors in human judgment, especially during religious

persecutions.

> Heresy cannot be burned, nor imprisoned, nor starved. It laughs at presbyteries and synods, at ecumenical councils and the impotent thunders of Sinai. Heresy is the eternal dawn, the morning star, the glittering herald of the day. Heresy is the last and best thought. It is the perpetual New World, the unknown sea, toward which the brave all sail. It is the eternal horizon of progress.
>
> Heresy extends the hospitalities of the brain to a new thought.[47]

Ingersoll acknowledged that new discoveries come as disturbances to the status quo.

Essentially, Ingersoll sought greater intellectual freedom for his hearers. He insisted: "We need free bodies and free minds, - free labor and free thought, - chainless hands and fetterless brains."[48] He challenged, "I say, take off these chains - break those manacles - free those limbs - release that brain! I plead for the right to think - to reason - to investigate."[49] Disciplining theological dogmatism by examining religious tenets against "truths" discovered through all academic and scientific pursuits, Ingersoll said, "Whoever has an opinion of his own, and honestly expresses it, will be guilty of heresy. Heresy is what the minority believe; it is the name given by the powerful to the doctrine of the weak."[50] With radical individualism, he rejected theological authority:

> They said then and they say now, that it is dangerous for man to be free. I deny it. Out on the intellectual sea there is room enough for every sail. In the intellectual air there is space enough for every wing.
>
> The man who does not do his own thinking is a slave, and is a traitor to himself and to his fellowmen.
>
> Every man should stand under the blue and stars, under the infinite flag of nature, the peer of every other man.
>
> Standing in the presence of the Unknown, all have the same right to think, and all are equally interested in the great questions of origin and destiny.[51]

Ingersoll championed intellectual freedom persistently:

> We should all remember that the intellect has no knees, and that whatever the attitude of the body may be, the brave soul is always found erect. Whoever worships, abdicates. Whoever believes, at the commands of power, tramples his own individuality beneath his feet, and voluntarily robs himself of all that renders man superior to brute.[52]

Stating that, "Religion tries to force all minds into one mould,"[53] he added:

> The church has been, and still is, the great robber. She has rifled not only the pockets but the brains of the world. She is the stone at the sepulcher of liberty; the upas tree in whose shade the intellect of man has withered; the Gorgon beneath whose gaze the human heart has turned to stone.[54]

Ingersoll renounced bland conformity to theological pronouncements, claimed that the institutional church caused mental paralysis, and emphatically accused the church of hindering the principle which he valued most highly, individual freedom of thought and expression.

> While it was sacrilege to touch with the hand the pots and pans of the temple, it was blasphemy to doubt or question anything in the book. And then the right to think was gone, and the right to use the brain that God had given was taken away, and religion was intrenched behind that citadel called blasphemy.[55]

His imaginative lecture on "Mistakes of Moses" contains an appeal for intellectual reformation of the orthodox clergy; Ingersoll desired that every minister will be not a repeating parrot, nor an owl sitting upon a dead limb of the tree of knowledge and hooting the hoots that clergymen hooted for eighteen hundred years.[56] Instead, he desired that the professors of Christianity be permitted to disclose the findings of their investigations, to enjoy freedom to search in every direction, and to be untrammeled by the contemporary superstitions.[57] In contrast with the narrow and confined theology of the orthodox fundamentalism which he rejected, Robert G. Ingersoll's "religion of humanity" seems more general and universal:

> The real Bible is not the work of inspired men, nor prophets, nor apostles, nor evangelists, nor of Christs. Every man who finds a fact, adds, as it were, a word to this great book. It is not attested by prophecy, by miracles or signs....This book appeals to all the surroundings of man. Each thing that exists testifies of its perfection. The earth, with its heart of fire and crowns of

> snow; with its forests and plains, its rocks and seas; with its every wave and cloud; with its every leaf and bud and flower, confirms its every word, and the solemn stars, shining in the infinite abysses, are the eternal witnesses of its truth.[58]

In his lecture on "Blasphemy," Ingersoll described the true Bible: "It is the sum of all actual knowledge of man, and every man who discovers a new fact adds a new verse to this bible."[59] He contended that "ideas cannot be dislocated by racks, nor crushed in iron boots," recognizing that a heretic's thoughts can endure.[60]

Insisting upon individual freedom of thought and expression and prizing humanity's accumulated knowledge gained from every source, Ingersoll's man-centered religion did not degenerate into philosophical nihilism before a threatening spectre of human meaninglessness. Almost ironically, some of Ingersoll's most profound statements came in the face of death, frequently before an open grave, where he reflected briefly upon the meaning of life. When he pronounced a funeral eulogy for his brother Ebon, Ingersoll seems to recognize an ultimate assurance in <u>love</u>:

> Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of a wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unreplying dead there comes no word; but in the night of death hope sees a star and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing.[61]

If Ingersoll recognized the need to hope and assurance through love, perhaps it was because he found an unanswered question before the open grave. As he expressed this before a child's grave:

> From the wondrous tree of life the buds and blossoms fall with ripened fruit, and in the common bed of earth patriarchs and babes sleep side by side....Every cradle asks us "Whence?" and every coffin "Whither?"[62]

He equated justice with worship, love with the priest, ignorance with slavery, and happiness with the highest good.[63] Before the uncertainty, the unknown, and the undiscovered which inevitably enters human experience as part of its

common stuff, Ingersoll inspired an adventure: "A believer is a songless bird in a cage; a Freethinker is an eagle parting the clouds with tireless wings."[64] And before the grave of Walt Whitman he paid a compliment equally true of Ingersoll: "He wrote a liturgy for mankind; he wrote a great and splendid psalm of life, and he gave to us the gospel of humanity - the greatest gospel that can be preached."[65] A more accurate statement, however, is that Robert G. Ingersoll presented a message which was neither new nor novel, a message which advocated a "religion of humanity" which was never effectively refuted by those whom such philosophy most antagonized.[66]

FOOTNOTES

[1] Wayland Maxfield Parrish and Alfred Dwight Huston, "Robert G. Ingersoll," A History and Criticism of American Public Address Edited by W. Norwood Brigance (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960), I, p. 363.

[2] Lionel Crocker, "Robert Green Ingersoll's Influence on American Oratory," The Quarterly Journal of Speech XXIV (April, 1938), p. 312.

[3] Sidney Warren, American Freethought 1860-1914 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 81.

[4] Michael Monahan, Psalms of Papyrus (East Orange: The Papyrus Company, 1909), p. 29.

[5] Stow Persons, Free Thought: An American Faith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), p. 153.

[6] J. M. Robertson, A History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century (London: Watts and Company, 1929), p. 446.

[7] Walter P. Rusterholtz, "Robert G. Ingersoll: Modern Prophet of The Unknown," American Heretics and Saints (Boston: Manthorne and Burack, 1938), p. 239.

[8] W. H. Platt, God Out and Man In; or, Replies to Robert G. Ingersoll (Rochester, 1883), p. ix.

[9] Ibid., p. x.

[10] Thomas Dixon, Jr. Dixon on Ingersoll, (New York: J. S. Ogilvie, 1892), pp. 29-30.

[11] L. A. Lambert, Notes on Ingersoll (Buffalo: Buffalo Catholic Publication Company, 1883), p. 4.

[12] Samuel Ives Curtis, Ingersoll and Moses: A Reply (Chicago, 1880), p. 86.

13

George C. Lorimer, "Reply to Dr. Lorimer," Mistakes of Ingersoll and His Answer Complete Edited by J. B. McClure (Chicago, 1891), III, p. 53.

14

James Maclaughlin, "James Maclaughlin's Reply," Mistakes, IV, pp. 48-49.

15

George R. Wendling, Ingersollism: From a Secular Point of View (Chicago: 1883), p. 24.

16

Henry Ward Beecher, "Henry Ward Beecher's Comments on Mr. Ingersoll's Faith, and Funeral Discourse," Mistakes, II, p. 149.

17

Robert G. Ingersoll, quoted, "I was born, and this event which has never for a moment ceased to influence my life, took place, according to an entry found in one Bible, on the 12th day of August in the year of grace 1833, according to another entry in another Bible, on the 11th of August in the same year." The Letters of Robert G. Ingersoll, Edited with a biographical introduction by Eva Ingersoll Wakefield, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), p. 3. However, biographers generally and Mrs. Wakefield included state August 11 as his birth date.

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Mrs. Wakefield wrote, "In the course of John Ingersoll's ministerial career, it is of record that he preached in New York, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky and Illinois. The clergyman's constant changes in pulpit were owing to his fierce and fearless sermon-tirades against chattel slavery, which caused him to become anathema to the majority of his congregations." Letters, p. 11. C. H. Cramer noted, "Moves were frequent; after holding several pastorates in New York, Ingersoll took his family to a number of towns in Ohio's Western Reserve (Oberlin, Ashtabula, North Madison, Rome) and in Illinois (Greenville and Marion). He also preached in the adjoining states of Kentucky, Indiana and Michigan - and for a brief period in 1849 made an unsuccessful attempt to operate a grocery store in Wisconsin." Royal Bob: The Life of Robert G. Ingersoll, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1952), p. 21. Orvin Larson explained that "The three years at Pittford was the longest period that John Ingersoll, as a minister, was to spend in one place. A revivalist by temperament, as well as by vocation, he was highly susceptible to "calls." And he was called often....It was well that the Reverend was ready to move on when the Lord called. For there were those in the various communities that he came to who did not like his talk against slavery." American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll, (New York: Citadel Press, 1962), p. 13.

19

C. H. Cramer recorded that, "From the standpoint of educational training it is apparent that Ingersoll was largely self-taught and that his learning came from his own extensive reading. From early childhood he had read the Bible, and among the books in his father's library he made himself acquainted with Calvin's Institutes, Paley's Evidences, Jonathan Edwards on

The Will, the works of Milton (in Ingersoll's opinion the Puritan poet put epaulets on God's shoulders and made the devil a high-ranking artillery officer), Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, The History of the Waldenses, Foxe's Book of Martyrs and Jenkyn's On the Atonement (Ingersoll thought the author had some atoning to do for writing the book!)." Royal Bob, p. 27. Orvin Larson stated that, "Robert's poetic period lasted several years and coincided with his discovery of Burns, Moore, Goldsmith, Shelley, Keats, Byron, Coleridge, Poe, and Shakespeare. Robert found Shelley's "Queen Mab" to be one of the finest compositions in the world....But Robert's literary passions became Burns and Shakespeare. 'Shakespeare is my Bible, Burns my hymn-book,' he often said." American Infidel, p. 26. Charles T. Gorham said, "Ingersoll was a man of extensive reading, wide knowledge, and prodigious memory. For the most part self-educated, he was for that reason the better equipped for his special work. He would have been spoiled by a university education. This seems to have been his own view." Robert G. Ingersoll, (London: Watts and Company, 1921), p. 103.

20 Herman E. Kittredge, Ingersoll: A Biographical Appreciation, (New York: Dresden Publishing Company, 1911), p. 283.

21 Orvin Larson, American Infidel, p. 45.

22 Ibid., p. 33.

23 Eva Ingersoll Wakefield recorded, "Young Robert Ingersoll delivered his maiden speech at a church barbeque and picnic on the outskirts of Shawneetown, Illinois, in 1856, at the age of twenty-three, on the subject of Thomas Paine; and he continued to lecture on religious topics until 1899, the year of his death." Letters, p. 93.

24 Orvin Larson, American Infidel, p. 46.

25 C. H. Cramer stated, "Ingersoll barely carried his home town of Peoria. The totals indicate that in the main those who voted for Douglas voted for Ingersoll also - for example, the latter carried Peoria County by 200 votes, while the Little Giant's plurality was 214." Royal Bob, p. 45. Larson recorded, "Peoria City and County gave Ingersoll 3754 votes and Kellogg 3550. Douglas also carried the City and County, receiving 3739 votes to Lincoln's 3539." American Infidel, p. 48. Cameron Rogers reported, "Though Bob in every debate that followed outreasoned, outtalked, and outguessed his opponent, the voters of the Fourth Congressional District voted a straight Republican ticket in a body, and when in November, 1860, the lawyer of Sangamon was elected to the Presidency of the United States, Bob resumed his law practice in Peoria, a beaten but a well-known and popular figure in the politics of the state." Colonel Bob Ingersoll, (Garden City: National Weekly Publishing Company, 1927), p. 105. At this point the modern historian can speculate about what effect winning this Congressional race

might have exerted on the political future of Ingersoll, whose reputation as an outstanding trial lawyer was growing in Illinois. The question remains: would success in professional politics provided a sufficient outlet for the creative energies which Ingersoll invested in criticizing religions as he found it?

26

Cameron Rogers wrote, "On February 28, 1867, Colonel Oglesby appointed Robert G. Ingersoll attorney general of the State of Illinois. Herein he was actuated primarily by the fact that Bob's reputation as a lawyer was now second to none in the West, but what also much weighed with him was the appointee's extraordinary popularity not only with his party but with men of prominence of entirely different political persuasion." Colonel Bob Ingersoll, p. 179. It can be noted briefly that the capacity to gain the political support from different parties is recognized as a crucial capacity for a man who usually wins major offices.

27

Charles T. Gorham stated, "At the age of thirty-four Ingersoll became Attorney-General of Illinois, and held the office for two years almost to the day. During that time a higher position came within his reach. A deputation representing three-fourths of the delegates attending the Republican State Convention held at Peoria in May, 1868, waited on him and suggested his nomination to the governorship of the State. Knowing that his Agnostic opinions had made him unpopular with all the religious parties, Ingersoll declined the honor. He would not bow the knee in the house of Rimmon. 'My religious belief,' he said, 'is my own. It belongs to me, not to the State of Illinois. I would not smother one sentiment of my heart to be the emperor of the round globe.'" Robert G. Ingersoll, p. 11. Eva Ingersoll Wakefield said, "Ingersoll was the first choice of three-fourths of the delegates to the Republican State Convention of May 6, 1868. However, as his heterodox religious opinions has already become well-known throughout Illinois, and as the John M. Palmer backers were capitalizing this fact to the utmost, it was felt needful to secure from Ingersoll some pledge to remain silent concerning the subject of religion. But when the matter was put before him, he flatly refused to make any pledge or promise whatever. The consequences of this uncompromising moral position, together with General Palmer's breach of his own pledge not to accept the nomination, were the failure of Colonel Ingersoll to win the coveted political prize, and the victory of General Palmer. The defeat of Robert G. Ingersoll for the nomination of Governor of Illinois, marked the abrupt and dramatic termination of his personal political career." Letters, pp. 40-41.

28

Standard references sustain this contention. "He was prominent in politics for several years and had he not given such frequent expression to his agnostic views he would doubtless have been honored with high offices, though, to judge from his refusal of two or three diplomatic posts, he was far from eager for office." The Encyclopedia Americana, XV (New York: Americana Corporation, 1952), p. 130. "He served (1867-69) as attorney general of Illinois, and contemporary evidence indicates that had it not been for his refusal to be silent on his agnostic beliefs, he would have

become governor of Illinois." The New Century Cyclopedia of Names, II (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954), p. 2119. "His friends believed that after his service as attorney-general he might have become governor of Illinois except for his heresy." Dictionary of American Biography, Edited by Dumas Malone, IX (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 470.

Orvin Larson speculated concerning the significance of Ingersoll's defeat: "'Humboldt" was a sign that Ingersoll had forsworn elective office. It was an infidel's clear manifesto. If he had been elected governor, he could not have delivered it - that is, if he wanted a second term. Again, if he had been elected governor, a thirty-year career as a fearless foe of Bible and theology, church and clergy would not have materialized. Testing the sweets of elective victory and avid for office, he would have chosen the calling of politics." American Infidel, p. 101. Generally, a conclusion seems to emerge: that Ingersoll's inability to secure elective office, first as a United States representative and second the Republican nomination for governor of Illinois, was a foundation upon which he devoted his labors to promote agnosticism.

29

Ingersoll, quoted, Letters, p. 79. However, Cramer doubted this account and cited specific information to sustain his doubt: "There is no contemporary account of the incident, and Ingersoll did not achieve prominence as an antireligious speaker until several years later. The biographers do not indicate their source for the alleged pronunciamento. The legend appears to be based on the recollection twenty-one years later of one Edward P. Fox, who represented himself as a delegate to the Illinois Republican convention of 1868." Royal Bob, pp. 74-75.

30

C. H. Cramer said, "Few recall that it was Ingersoll the political orator, and not Ingersoll the religious skeptic, whom the country first applauded. It was in the centennial year that he won, quite suddenly and dramatically, a national reputation and his initial national audience. They were achieved through a combination of oratorical skill and good political fortune. The stroke of luck derived from the invitation to make the presidential nominating speech on behalf of James G. Blain at the Republican convention in Cincinnati." Royal Bob, p. 13. Cramer contended, "There is no question, however, that Blaine would have been named if the delegates had been allowed to vote immediately after he was put in nomination." Royal Bob, p. 80. Cameron Rogers mentioned, "As a matter of history, save for Garfield's nomination of John Sherman in the Convention of 1880, there has never in the United States been made a greater speech before a political convention than this, conceived and created in the streaming dawn of a day in the early summer of 1876. William Jennings Bryan was twenty years later to approach it in enthusiasm of reception, but there was no Democrat at that memorable convention who claimed for the speech of the boy orator of the Platte equality with that of Bob Ingersoll of Illinois. As the Munn trial had established and lent lustre to his reputation as a lawyer, so did the speech before the Republican Convention definitely fix his position as an orator above that of any other American, only excepting Abraham Lincoln, who has ever addressed his countrymen. When, as the cheering died away at last, he left the platform, he was, in the seasoned opinion of men who had sat in Congress for

thirty years and more, the ranking orator of all those that they had heard, Clay, Webster, Everett, Calhoun, and the rest." Colonel Bob Ingersoll, pp. 207-208. Orvin Larson summarized, "The effect of the speech, said the Chicago Times, 'was indescribable...The coolest-headed in the hall were stirred to the wildest expression....Words can do but meagre justice to the wizard power of this extraordinary man.' The New York Herald reported that Ingersoll easily took all the oratorical honors; the Chicago Tribune that he 'swept the whole body like a tumultuous flood;' the Philadelphia Record that 'no similar effort had produced a similar enthusiasm within our recollection." American Infidel, p. 119.

31

Cameron Rogers reported, "On July 4th, Bob delivered at Peoria the Centennial Oration, and thonceforward until November travelled from coast to coast campaigning for Mr. Hayes and the Republican Party. As the Chicago Tribune editorially observed, 'his voice was the trumphet call from Maine to California,' for the thousands who heard him in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maine, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin seemed to have been effectually awakened to the menace of the Democratic resurgence and voted accordingly." Colonel Bob Ingersoll, p. 209. The instrument of rhetorical persuasion which Robert G. Ingersoll employed effectively in political campaigning proved equally potent in stimulating audience response when Ingersoll later spoke on religious topics. Perhaps it can be concluded that rhetorical skill works effectively for a master of that art when he changes his subject matter with a different topic.

32

Eva Ingersoll Wakefield, Letters, p. 49. C. H. Cramer provided examples: "During a period of only two months in 1877, to cite an example of his schedule, he not only filled a number of engagements in Colorado and Wyoming but also spoke five times in San Francisco; twice at San Jose, Stockton, Sacramento, Oakland, Virginia City and Carson City; once at Petaluma, Marysville, Vallejo, Nevada City and Salt Lake City....In 1894 he spoke a hundred times; during one stretch he delivered addresses on thirty consecutive nights, rested a week, and then resumed the heavy schedule of speaking on consecutive evenings for another month." Royal Bob, pp. 96-97.

33

Orvin Larson reported, "Later in the year, in November, Ingersoll was under consideration for the German mission. Hayes and Secretary of State William Evarts had invited the Illinois Republican members in Congress to submit their choice for the post. Unanimously the Illinois Congressmen chose Ingersoll." American Infidel, p. 128. Cameron Rogers explained, "The entire Illinois Congressional delegation requested Mr. Hayes to appoint him Ambassador to Germany and prepared for protracted lobbying with a view of electing him Senator, Attorney General, or Ambassador to France, as occasion offered or desire was expressed. In the meanwhile, Mr. Hayes was earnestly invited to devote his best attention to the Berlin appointment. Mr. Hayes did so, but Bob, to the confounding and dismay of his friends and supporters, departed to Washington and made a call on Mr. Evarts, the Secretary of State. Mr. Evarts was glad to see him but on the whole greatly astonished when his visitor requested that his name be not considered in connection with the Berlin mission under any circumstances whatever, adding with a broad and charming smile 'that there was no place in the gift of the administration' which he would accept." Colonel Bob Ingersoll, pp. 216-217.

34

C. H. Cramer suggested, "If the first orator of the Republican party had spoken in New York the chances are that Blaine would have been elected. On the basis of political quotations of that day, every campaign speech made by Ingersoll was worth several times 1149 votes. It was said that one blast upon his bugle horn was worth a thousand ballots....The fact remains, however, that Royal Bob did not make a single political speech in 1884, in New York or any other state." Royal Bob, p. 213. Part of the irony in this particular political situation is that Robert G. Ingersoll first secured national attention when he placed the name of James G. Blaine in nomination for the Presidency at the Republican national convention in 1876. The facts that Ingersoll enjoyed a national popularity and that he was well known within the Republican party made him a powerful force, perhaps one who could have secured Blaine's eventual election.

35

Charles T. Gorham reported, "His last words, 'I am better now,' were those of the loved brother whom he had lost twenty years before. The disease which closed his career was angina pectorsis, and after his death it was learned that for two and a half years previously he had known precisely what his condition was and that the end might come at any moment. He kept the secret from his family, and always replied to inquiries after his health that he was 'all right.'" Robert G. Ingersoll, p. 108. Orvin Larson recorded, "Until after his death, Ingersoll's family never knew that he had the heart condition so well did Robertson heed his caution not to drop a hint of it to them." American Infidel, p. 263.

Further, intimate contemporary biographers contend that Ingersoll was a life-long agnostic. I. Newton Baker stated, "The simple truth is that Mr. Ingersoll was an unbeliever from his childhood. He has said to me, as to others, that he never remembered the time when his mind did not reject and his heart resent what he believed to be the cruelties and falsehoods of many of the Bible doctrines and narratives, and when he did not hate with all his soul the injustice and savagery of the man-made God of the Scriptures." An Intimate View of Robert G. Ingersoll, (New York: C. P. Farrell, 1920), p. 62. Baker added, "Colonel Ingersoll did not believe in a special Providence caring for each human soul, answering prayer and extending his almighty arm in rescue of the innocent and helpless and in reward of the faithful and righteous; nor did he believe that Providence ever heard or answered the most horrible prayer ever offered by human lips or written by human hand - David's 109th imprecatory Psalm." An Intimate View of Robert G. Ingersoll, p. 146. Wakefield contends that Ingersoll lived and died as a confident and ardent agnostic: "As far back as he could remember anything he had rebelled consciously or unconsciously against the cruelties and absurdities of the Christian creed....The first sermon that made any deep impression upon him was one he heard at the age of seven. A 'Free Will' Baptist preacher gave such graphic and frightful description of hell that it left 'a mark, like a scar,' on his mind forever....From that moment, he told himself: 'It is a lie, and I hate your religion.'...This 'Free Will' sermon marked the turning-point in young Ingersoll's intellectual life." Letters, pp. 8-9.

Ingersoll's enduring contribution is his proclamation of individual intellectual freedom of thought and expression. Wakefield wrote, "The dominant purpose of Robert Ingersoll's whole life was to further the cause of intellectual freedom - to liberate the mind and spirit of man. And, in

view of the fact that he regarded the orthodox church and theological superstition as the two greatest obstacles to intellectual liberty, it was natural and inevitable that his lectures upon this subject of religion should be chiefly concerned with fearless and merciless arraignments of the church and the Bible." Letters, p. 92. Baker is generous in complimenting Ingersoll: "More than any man of his day he wrote and spoke and labored for an unshackled healthy brain, an untrammelled, truthful tongue." An Intimate View of Robert G. Ingersoll, p. 81.

Further, Ingersoll's commitment to freedom of thought and expression and his active demonstration of that principle through rhetorical discourse was a factor in producing his persuasive effectiveness. I. Newton Baker wrote: "Mr. Ingersoll's method in the composition of his written and spoken words was singularly spontaneous and unmechanical. He was not a phrase-tinker or word-carpenter. His pictures flashed from his brain as finished products." An Intimate View of Robert G. Ingersoll, p. 48. Wakefield commented: "And the way he said what he had to say was unforgettable and unsurpassed, because at heart he was a prophet, selflessly consecrated to his conception of truth; and accordingly, his words were the spontaneous, natural utterance of his thoughts, and, at the same time, the products of refined and subtle art." Letters, p. 69. How Ingersoll's commitment to and practice of individual freedom influenced his rhetorical composition and delivery constitutes an important subject for students of the psychology of persuasion. However, it seems evident that this belief motivated Ingersoll to develop rhetorical skill. Wakefield concluded, "The primary urge and incentive back of Robert Ingersoll's ambition to become an orator was the supreme aspiration to make his beloved country 'intellectually free!'" Letters, p. 69. His philosophy may have influenced his rhetorical style. This is suggested in Baker's description: "As all the world knows, he spoke his mind freely, fully, without fear, without reserve. What he thought and felt he said, and his meaning was always plain; but he was not arrogant or dogmatic, only positive, in his speech." An Intimate View of Robert G. Ingersoll, p. 100.

A similar study should focus on the controversy between Ingersoll and his opponents. A foundation for this study could be predicated on Wrage and Baskerville's "Revealed Religion vs. The Religion of Humanity," in American Forum: Speeches on Historic Issues 1788-1900 (New York, 1960), pp. 283-312.

36

Wakefield, Letters, p. 99. But she also stated, "'Why I Am An Agnostic' (1896), marked the crown and culmination of Ingersoll's anti-theological lecture career; it might almost be described as his intellectual autobiography in miniature." Letters, pp. 98-99. Here we have an excellent example of what I call incarnational rhetoric; incarnational rhetoric is that discourse which articulates a particular meaning or message which a man incompasses within his life and embodies as a human being: the message is the man.

While Ingersoll was popular as a persuasive speaker, he stood independent from institutions and associations. For example, Stow Persons stated that the Free Religious Association made no effort to enlist Ingersoll's powerful support, although he was America's arch infidel. Free Religion: An American Faith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), p. 153.

37 Robert G. Ingersoll, "Human Rights," Complete Lectures of Colonel R. G. Ingersoll (Chicago, M. A. Donohue and Company, undated), p. 113.

38 Robert G. Ingersoll, quoted, Kittredge, Ingersoll, p. iv; also see Works Edited by C. P. Farrell (New York: C. P. Farrell, 1900), IV, p. 66.

39 Robert G. Ingersoll, "Religious Intolerance," Complete Lectures, p. 126.

40 Robert G. Ingersoll, "Plea for Individuality and Arraignment of the Church," Complete Lectures, p. 175.

41 Robert G. Ingersoll, The Philosophy of Ingersoll Edited and arranged by Vere Goldthwaite (San Francisco and New York: Paul Elder and Company, 1906), p. 9.

42 Ibid., p. 12.

43 Robert G. Ingersoll, "Plea," p. 180.

44 Robert G. Ingersoll, "Ghosts," Works of Robert G. Ingersoll (New York City: The Ingersoll Publishers, 1900), I, p. 326.

45 Ingersoll, "Religious Intolerance," p. 403.

46 Robert G. Ingersoll, "The Great Infidels," Works, III, p. 308.

47 Robert G. Ingersoll, "Heretics and Heresies," Works, I, p. 250.

48 Robert G. Ingersoll, "Thomas Paine," Works, I, p. 162.

49 Robert G. Ingersoll, "Ghosts," p. 323.

50 Ingersoll, "Heretics and Heresies," p. 209.

51 Ingersoll, "Liberty of," p. 331.

52 Ingersoll, "Plea," p. 174.

[53] Ibid., p. 175.

[54] Ibid., p. 176.

[55] Ingersoll, "Religious Intolerance," p. 399.

[56] Robert G. Ingersoll, "The Mistakes of Moses," Works, II, p. 16.

[57] Ingersoll, "The Ghosts," 259-264.

[58] Ingersoll, "Heresies and Heretics," pp. 252-253.

[59] Ingersoll, "Blasphemy," p. 5.

[60] Ingersoll, "Plea," p. 8.

[61] Robert G. Ingersoll, "E. C. Ingersoll's Funeral," Complete Lectures, p. 15.

[62] Robert G. Ingersoll, "Oration at a Child's Grave," Complete Lectures, pp. 3-4.

[63] Robert G. Ingersoll, Philosophy, p. ix.

[64] Robert G. Ingersoll, "Plea," p. 6.

[65] Robert G. Ingersoll, "Address at the Funeral of Walt Whitman," Liberty in Literature (New York: Truth Seeker Company, 1890), p. 84.